

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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## **The Victorian Drug Court must be accessible state wide**



The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) today releases a position paper entitled 'Drug Courts in Victoria: evidence & options' which calls for the Victorian Drug Court to be accessible in all regions of Victoria. Currently the Victorian Drug Court is only available in the South East Region of Melbourne, even though up to 70% of prisoners are recent illicit drug consumers. The paper also calls for the piloting of a Family Drug Court which would reduce the trauma and harms which occur in alcohol and other drug related child protection matters.

VAADA's position paper identifies that the most recent review of the Drug Court of Victoria reveals a return on investment of over five dollars for each dollar spent.

The Drug Court of Victoria administers Drug Treatment Orders, which can be used in lieu of a prison sentence.

Mr Sam Biondo, EO of VAADA, says 'the Drug Court of Victoria which has been operating from just one region in Victoria over the past decade, has a far better track record than the alternative of prison with regard to reducing reoffending, costs and improving community wellbeing.'

Research indicates that those who successfully completion of a Drug Treatment Order were less likely to reoffend (32% less than the comparison group) and experienced a doubling in full time employment.

Conversely, the failure of prisons to protect the community through prevention and deterrence is illustrated in a number of recent independent reports:

- The Victorian Auditor-General has forecast a capacity crisis in Victoria's prisons by 2016 and identified a lack of treatment and rehabilitation programs;
- the Sentencing Advisory Council has recently reported that prisoners are ineffective in preventing crime; and
- the Productivity Commission has cited a cost of \$100,000 per prisoner in Victoria each year.

Mr Biondo says, 'there are many drug court models nationally and internationally which provide significant benefits for communities through reducing crime and associated costs and improving community health and wellbeing. The Victorian Government has indicated support for expanding the Drug Court in a recent Department of Health paper. This must be actioned urgently to reduce the prison population and increase community safety.'

Mr Biondo continues, 'Victoria should implement a Family Drug Court as international evidence indicates that these courts reduce the need for foster care and increase the safe reunification of children with their parents.'

'State wide implementation of the Drug Court would result in significant cost savings in the mid to long term, which could be allocated to more cost effective areas than prisons, such as health, education, housing and other welfare as a means of reducing crime but most of which remain under significant financial pressure. currently, Mr Biondo concludes.

*VAADA is the peak body that represents over 100 Alcohol and other Drug services across Victoria. On a daily basis these services are dealing with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.*

**For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Sam Biondo on 0414 974 121 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.**